United Nations S/PV.6983

Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6983rd meeting
Thursday, 20 June 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Sir Mark Lyall Grant	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Sharifov
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Bouchaara
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Rwanda	Mr. Manzi
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2013/350)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-36881 (E)

Accessible document

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2013/350)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Spain and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2013/350, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kubiš.

Mr. Kubiš: We are meeting amid intense focus on ensuring that Afghanistan's three complex and intertwined transition processes — political, security and economic — are on track. Those efforts are due to culminate in 2014, but the fundamentals are to be put in place this year.

The very core of transition is the strengthening of Afghan national ownership and leadership. The onus for driving progress is thus on the Government of Afghanistan and the country's leading political forces. There is, however, a clear need for sustained and predictable international support, through 2014 and beyond, in ways that reinforce Afghanistan's leadership.

As announced this week, Afghan security forces have entered the last phase in assuming the lead responsibility for security throughout the country. Anti-Government elements are, however, seeking to counter this by targeting security personnel and terrorizing civilians. They aim to shake the population's confidence in the Government and its armed forces.

We are seeing increasingly brutal, complex assaults on high-profile targets, high in civilian casualties but low on reaching military objectives, but nevertheless garnering media attention. Targeted killings of those deemed supportive of the Government include civil servants and judicial workers, in violation of international law and the norms of war. In population centres, attacks in public spaces demonstrate a complete disregard for civilian lives.

Afghan security forces fight bravely and bear the brunt of losses, showing increased courage, confidence and competence in countering the intentions of the anti-Government forces. At the same time, the Afghan forces, notably the National Army, urgently require critical enablers such as air capacity to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. The international community must assist them.

A smooth and legitimate transfer of power is widely acknowledged as the most critical part of the transition, underpinning all other efforts. President Karzai continues to reiterate his commitment to standing aside, in accordance with the Constitution. Planning and positioning ahead of the polls, scheduled for 5 April 2014, dominates the political landscape.

Although I see progress in many technical areas, I am concerned by the continued delays in the passage of the two major pieces of electoral legislation. For orderly and timely preparations for the polls, promulgation is necessary before the summer recess of the National Assembly. That will require compromise and goodwill on all sides, notably the proactive engagement of the Government. The continuous lack of progress in this critical area has already raised questions in some minds about intentions to hold elections in a timely and acceptable manner.

An increased focus on a broad national accord with regard to electoral platforms and possible presidential candidates is legitimate and even advisable. However, that must not be at the expense of electoral preparations, and it cannot and should not be a substitute for credible elections. There is no alternative to inclusive and

transparent elections as a means of delivering a political transition with the necessary degree of legitimacy and acceptability. The elections are central to international and domestic legitimacy and sustained extraordinary support on the part of the international community for the new Government.

Peace is the Afghan people's greatest desire. Political efforts centred on establishing a Taliban office in Doha for the purpose of talks between the Afghan High Peace Council and authorized representatives of the Taliban to promote peace and reconciliation led to contradictory developments and announcements this week. We hope that the current controversies and legitimate concerns related to the Taliban office in Doha will soon be resolved, thus opening the way for direct peace and reconciliation discussions between the High Peace Council and the Taliban. We also hope that this will be accompanied by a reduction of violence and of civilian casualties.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan stands ready to support all peace and reconciliation efforts, based on and in full conformity with its mandate. Among other things, it stands ready to facilitate an inter-Afghan track-two dialogue as well as to engage with the Taliban on issues related to the promotion of human rights, the application of humanitarian law and the reduction of civilian casualties.

The promotion of peace and reconciliation requires an enabling regional environment. Recent developments between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2013/350), are of concern. Such tensions are unfortunate and dangerous, especially at this stage of Afghanistan's development. They bring in additional elements of risk to an already complex and complicated political and security situation in Afghanistan and in the region. It is for the two countries to address those concerns and problems and their underlying reasons, to build trust and to refrain from any steps that could contribute to an escalation of tensions and inflamed public sentiments. The two neighbouring countries share common concerns and interests in fighting terrorism. They can succeed or fail together.

I am encouraged by the positive exchanges following the recent Pakistani elections between President Karzai and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, as well as by the resumption of high-level military contacts between the two countries, with the participation of the International Security Assistance Force.

A major conference in Kabul next month will assess the progress made on the mutual commitments to Government reform and international civilian assistance made one year ago in Tokyo. Frank discussions between the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners must result in a reinvigorated agenda for action in the coming year. Among the hard deliverables are not only issues of economic development and good governance, but also, at this juncture of the transition, issues related to elections and human rights. They address fundamental building blocks of the Afghan State.

This week's appointment of new human rights commissioners to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission raised concerns at whether the appointment process complied with international principles and standards and met Afghan legal requirements of transparency, broad consultations and selection of independent, qualified individuals. These concerns are currently under review by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and will be further reviewed by the respective international accreditation body for such national human rights institutions. In the meantime, the work of the Commission will be under increased scrutiny.

The implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and protecting and promoting the rights of Afghan women and girls and the gains they have made over the past decade, are another central obligation. Women's equal and meaningful participation in economic, political and public life is constitutionally guaranteed in Afghanistan and globally recognized as central to improving social development, including the health and well-being of children, who represent the future of any nation. Key international donors are clear that any erosion of such commitments, including of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and its implementation, would have a direct negative impact on future international assistance.

Afghanistan's already acutely low humanitarian indicators are put further at risk by shrinking humanitarian space. But humanitarian response alone will not suffice, and greater attention and priority must be afforded to durable solutions and Government capacity. This includes a greater development focus

on disaster management systems, internally displaced persons and refugees, their strictly voluntary return and sustainable livelihoods, and sustaining access to and the quality of the health system.

This is a critical juncture. The trajectory is irreversible, but the Afghan authorities, the Afghan people and international partners need to work together in ensuring that it is sustainable. There are results to report, but setbacks appear and are and will be inevitable. The need is for predictability and confidence. Determined internal and external efforts are required to prove that the worse-case scenarios are wrong. This is challenging but possible.

The President: I thank Mr. Kubiš for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): Let me begin by first congratulating you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June. I thank you for holding today's debate on Afghanistan. I welcome the presence of my good friend, Special Representative Kubiš, among us here today. We thank him for his comprehensive briefing and steadfast support for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is at a critical juncture. As foreign forces prepare to withdraw next year, Afghan national forces are assuming full responsibility for the security and defence of their country. Two days ago in Kabul, a milestone was reached — the official launch of the fifth and final stage of the security transition. This is a remarkable achievement and a source of pride for the Afghan people. Our security forces are handling complex security situations with increased confidence and fortitude. We stand ready to consolidate our gains, stand on our feet, defend ourselves and secure lasting peace.

The transition in its entirety aims to bring enduring peace and stability to Afghanistan. To ensure the security and defence of our country, it is essential to bring all Afghans together through a national dialogue and in a spirit of national unity to achieve a political solution that is embraced by all. In recent months, Afghanistan has been extensively involved with various stakeholders, the United States of America in particular, in starting direct negotiations with the Taliban as part of the peace process. In that regard, an agreement was reached with the United States on the opening of a Taliban office in Doha, Qatar, under assurances that peace talks would be conducted in accordance with the following concrete set of principles.

The sole purpose of the office would be to serve as a venue for direct negotiations between the Taliban and the High Peace Council. The office would not serve as an official representation of the Taliban in the form of a Government, embassy, emirate or sovereign entity. The office would not engage in or support any activity related to terrorism and acts of violence, inconsistent with international law, and consistent with the provisions of resolutions 1988 (2011) and 2082 (2012).

Yet just two days ago, on 18 June, in a rather theatrical sequence of events, the Taliban office was inaugurated in a manner that contradicted the very principles to which I just referred. Furthermore, the public statement by the Taliban representatives in Doha not only lacked any clear commitment to peace talks with the Afghan High Peace Council —the sole body mandated to conduct peace talks — but made explicit reference to the continuation of violence. Again, that goes against the very spirit of peace.

Given the concerns that have arisen, emanating from the obvious contradictions pertaining to our peace process, the Government of Afghanistan decided, first, that the High Peace Council would not engage in peace talks under the circumstances in which the Taliban office was opened; and secondly, to suspend negotiations on the bilateral security agreement with the United States. Afghanistan naturally expects its international partners to stand against any threat to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. In fact, all of Afghanistan's partnership agreements are made in light of Afghanistan's national interests and aimed at promoting the country's peace, security and stability.

While Afghanistan is committed to a peace process and reconciliation that ensures a permanent end to the conflict, pursuing a process that will undermine the hard won gains of the past 12 years — our Constitution, the rights of all citizens, particularly women, and our democratic order — will by no means be acceptable to the Afghan people. Afghanistan does not recognize such a thing as the Emirate of the Taliban. The raising of the Taliban flag on Tuesday in Doha was just a reminder of a dark and bloody past from which our country still struggles to emerge. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is the sole sovereign and legitimate

authority chosen by the Afghan people and recognized and supported by the international community.

Further, Afghanistan's ownership of the peace and reconciliation process is indispensible, and will not be compromised. Any successful outcome to the reconciliation process requires preserving the Afghan-led and Afghan-managed character of the negotiations. This is an issue that has been recognized and endorsed both in Afghanistan and by the international community as a whole, including the Security Council.

I take this opportunity to wish to also make clear to the international community, all Member States and international and regional organizations that the Taliban office was established for one clear objective — peace talks that strictly observe agreed principles, as mentioned. Any other activity or function undertaken by or with the Taliban office outside the Afghan-led peace talks purposes is unacceptable.

The continuing campaign of fear and terror, violence and brutality endangers the prospects of the peace process. There has been an escalation in acts of violence in recent weeks, affecting all citizens — men, women and children — as well as international personnel. We condemn all heinous acts of terror, including the recent attacks on the International Organization for Migration, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Kabul airport and the Supreme Court. Children are increasingly bearing the brunt of the conflict. Last month in Kandahar, terrorists beheaded two children as they were scavenging for food to take home to their families next to a local police checkpoint. Days earlier, in Paktika province, children died in a suicide bombing near their school.

We also note with regret the continued civilian casualties caused by counter-terrorism operations. The loss of one innocent life is one too many. We condemn all incidents of civilian casualties and call for their immediate end.

Despite all the challenges we face, Afghanistan is confidently advancing forward towards another milestone, namely, next year's presidential and provincial council elections. President Karzai has embarked upon a broad consultative process with the relevant stakeholders, including civil society and political parties, with the clear aim of having the polling take place in a spirit of national unity and with consensus on core electoral issues. Afghans see successful elections as a new and important benchmark for progress that will allow the country to embrace the needs of the post-2014 transformation decade. Preparations for the polls are well under way, with voter registration and security preparations having already started. The electoral law and draft Independent Election Commission law were adopted by the lower house of Parliament and are now under consideration by the upper house. We welcome the readiness of the United Nations and other partners to support Afghan-led elections. We are confident that the elections will unify Afghans around a common objective.

Afghanistan has always seen regional cooperation as an important pillar of stability and prosperity in our part of the world. A new regional order is emerging, increasing the prospects for a more peaceful and stable region. The Istanbul Process has become a catalyst for results-oriented cooperation in our wider region. We are encouraged by the strong commitment shown by all regional and international partners for that historic initiative. That was further exemplified by the third ministerial meeting of the Heart of Asia countries, held in Almaty in April. We also thank the Government of China for its generosity in hosting the next ministerial meeting of the Process next year.

Afghanistan is committed to expanding relations with all of our neighbors. We applaud our brothers and sisters in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran for their recent successful elections.

The Government of Afghanistan looks forward to working with the new Government and leadership of Pakistan, and hopes that Pakistan will sincerely support peace and stability in our country. Afghanistan desires friendly relations with Pakistan that are characterized by mutual respect and observance of each other's national sovereignty. That is crucial to stability in Afghanistan and to prosperity and cooperation in the region.

Without any doubt, terrorism constitutes to pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of Afghanistan and the region. The people of Afghanistan are still the main victims of a heinous and continuous terrorist campaign. The fact remains that, so long as terrorist sanctuaries continue to exist on Pakistan's soil and some elements continue to use terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy, peace will prevail neither in Afghanistan nor in the region. We also are very concerned about ongoing border shelling, which constitutes a serious

threat to Afghan sovereignty and the prospect of friendly relations between our two countries. We should not forget that, as two brotherly countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan have a shared stake in a successful fight against terrorism and in the prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan and our region.

We in Afghanistan know that long-term peace and prosperity is interlinked with development, good governance and human rights. The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework forms the basis for a revitalized partnership between Afghanistan and our international partners while addressing those key issues. Aid coherence, in partnership with the international community, is critical to our sustainable development. The mutual commitments made in Tokyo will be solidified during the transformation decade. In that regard, we look forward to the meeting of senior officials to be held in Kabul on 3 July.

By the same token, the empowerment of women as proactive members of Afghan society — as parliamentarians, peacebuilders and Government officials — and as the most vibrant members of civil society is among our proudest achievements. While obstacles remain to fully realize that goal, we are working to protect and promote the human rights of all Afghans, and those of women in particular. Afghanistan condemns in the strongest terms all incidents of violence against women. The fight against impunity is central to our human rights efforts, as evidenced by the prosecution of an increasing number of perpetrators in various parts of the country.

This moment marks an important chapter in Afghanistan's history. The security transition and the upcoming elections will mark major achievements for the future of our country. Those achievements will be the result of the diligent efforts that we have made over the past 12 years. We have come this far together on a joint journey founded on a shared commitment to the betterment of our country, for the benefit of current and future generations. Our mission is unfinished, but well on its way. Afghanistan has come a long way to even consider falling short of fulfilling the goals we set out in 2001. We have been, and we remain, steadfastly committed to building a peaceful, stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing and for his ongoing dedication and leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We also acknowledge the presence of Mr. Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and we thank him for the very important role he plays in New York.

This is clearly a decisive time in Afghanistan's transition. Significant progress has been made in security in the past few months. President Karzai's announcement, on 18 June, on milestone 2013 and the fifth and final tranche of transition will see the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) take national lead responsibility for security across the country and mark a turning point in the modern history of Afghanistan. Their capability has improved significantly, as demonstrated by their swift response to recent attacks in Kabul. In Uruzgan province, where Australia has focused its efforts, the ANSF is already in the lead and will assume full responsibility for security by the end of the year. The international community has signalled its strong commitment to the Afghan National Security Forces, which will be important for consolidating security gains. Finalizing ANSF sustainment mechanisms will be essential.

Economic and political transition will also be critical. International support will help to reinforce Afghan sovereignty.

A credible presidential election in 2014 will be indispensible to political transition. Afghanistan must take steps to intensify its preparations, in particular passing an improved electoral law by the upper house of Parliament. Resolving the impasse over the Independent Election Commission's structure law so that a new chairperson can be appointed is vital. It is axiomatic that the presidential elections be Afghan-led and run, but we also urge the Afghan Government to utilize international support, including that of the United Nations. The Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow II project of the United Nations Development Programme provides valuable technical support, which is important for maximizing voter participation and strengthening anti-fraud measures. UNAMA also has an important role to play in supporting Afghan institutions to prepare for the elections.

We urge the full implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women, which

is a bellwether commitment under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. Advancing opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan is a must and will be a decisive measure of the country's success.

The scale of international donor pledges at the 2012 Tokyo Conferences illustrates the international community's commitment to helping Afghanistan to achieve a secure, stable and prosperous future. But the international community's ability to sustain support for Afghanistan depends upon the Afghan Government delivering on its commitments under the Framework.

Only the Afghan Government itself can implement the reforms that will deliver good governance and ensure growth and stability. Concrete progress on anti-corruption efforts, human rights and economic reform is vital if the legitimate expectations of ordinary Afghans and of the broader international community are to be met. The forthcoming meeting in Kabul of a team of senior officials will be an important opportunity to review progress and address the shortfalls.

As the Secretary-General noted in his report (S/2013/350) and as Mr. Kubiš has outlined, Afghanistan continues to face significant humanitarian challenges. The increase in civilian casualties, attributed to anti-Government elements, is obviously of grave concern. We must all condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the recent attacks that have targeted civilians, including humanitarian workers, the Afghan judiciary and the offices of the International Organization for Migration.

The situation of children in particular is of greatest concern. The indiscriminate use by insurgents of suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices is deplorable. All parties must respect international humanitarian law, and the Taliban must do so. The issue of counter-narcotic efforts is a critical challenge. It is a matter of concern that the Secretary-General has reported a probable increase in poppy cultivation for a third consecutive year.

Australia has been a long-term supporter of an Afghan-led process of reconciliation and encourages the commencement of such a dialogue. We recognize that that will not be an easy or straightforward process and that there is no guarantee of success. But work towards peace and reconciliation must continue. We support efforts to build the conditions for reconciliation and, as Chair of the Security Council Committee esbalished pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), we will work to ensure that the Taliban sanctions regime supports an Afghan-led process. It is essential that momentum is sustained to build the foundations for an Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process taht leads to a durable political settlement. It is also important that we provide effective support for the role of the United Nations and United Nations-affiliated agencies in Afghanistan as transition moves forward and beyond 2014. We must get the UNAMA future mandate right, and ongoing adequate funding will be required.

In conclusion, as Ambassador Tanin has just said, Afghanistan's mission is unfinished but is well on its way. The United Nations and the international community remain committed to working to help Afghanistan complete that journey and consolidate its long-term security and stability well beyond 2014.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Jan Kubiš, for his comprehensive briefing. I also welcome Ambassador Tanin's contribution to today's debate.

We welcome the recent development in the security transition. The announcement by Afghan President Karzai this week to launch the fifth and final phase of the security transition is a significant milestone in the history of Afghanistan. The Afghan National Security Forces will now take full responsibility for leading and conducting all operations throughout the country. As the transition moves forward, continued international support will be all the more vital to ensure that the transition is irreversible and sustainable. However, an increase of 25 per cent in civilian casualties during the reporting period shows that grave security challenges remain. We are deeply concerned about the targeted killings of civilians, including international humanitarian workers.

Moreover, the recent terrorist attacks by the Taliban against judiciary institutions, including the Supreme Court in Kabul, are worrisome. They constitute a direct challenge to the establishment of the rule of law. The perpetrators must be brought to justice. All parties must take every feasible steps to ensure the protection of civilians and comply with their obligations under international law. Increased efforts to train the Afghan National Security Forces and provide it with all the necessary support will remain crucial tasks to effectively protect civilians and ensure accountability.

My delegation recognizes that the transition is not only a security process but also requires the full assumption of Afghan leadership and ownership in governance. In that regard, the presidential and provincial elections in 2014 will be an important landmark for the political transition. It is critical that the Afghan Government develop a credible electoral framework and ensure a transparent and participatory process, including the participation of women.

Gender equality and women's empowerment should continue to be a priority policy for the Government of Afghanistan to pursue. To that end, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has a crucial role to play in providing capacity-building and technical assistance to Afghan institutions. An Afghan-owned and Afghan-led national reconciliation process is another important step in moving forward the political transition. In that regard, we are encouraged by the Afghan Government's initiative on peace negotiations with the Taliban and by the opening of a Taliban office in Doha. It should serve to promote peace, not complicate the process.

We hope that further progress will be made towards achieving sustainable and lasting peace in Afghanistan. Afghanistan and the international community now stand at a critical juncture in achieving the agreed goals for 2014. The timely and faithful implementation of commitments is all the more crucial. The Korean Government will continue to support the international efforts for the capacity-building of Afghanistan. Following the contribution of $150 million to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund and the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan over the past two years, the Republic of Korea plans to contribute an additional $100 million this year to support capacity-building in the security and development sectors. We will strive to work closely with the Afghan Government and the international community towards a more prosperous, stable and democratic future for Afghanistan.

Mrs. DiCarlo (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Kubiš, for his informative briefing today. I ask that he continue to convey to the stafff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and to the members of the United Nations country team the deep gratitude of the United States for the critical work they do in the face of considerable challenges. We also wish to thank Ambassador Tanin for his participation in this meeting.

Today we are seeing the final steps in the preparations for a united and sovereign Afghanistan that will secure its rightful place in the community of nations. We commend the Afghan people as they manage three significant transitions — security, political and economic. The United States will continue to support Afghanistan through this critical period, as we jointly agreed in our strategic partnership agreement and committed to at the Tokyo and Chicago Conferences.

Afghan security and police forces continue to grow stronger and more capable. Afghanistan reached milestone 2013 earlier this week and is now in the lead for security nationwide, with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) moving into a supporting role. We welcome the endorsement, in Brussels on 5 June, by NATO and ISAF defence mininsters of the detailed concept for a non-combat NATO mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan forces post-2013.

As we look to Afghanistan's political transition, next year's election will be a historic opportunity to achieve a unifying moment when power is peacefully transferred to a newly elected President. That will reflect the success of the Afghan people in conducting a credible, inclusive and transparent election. We look forward to the establishment of a broadly agreed elections legislative framework as soon as possible. The implementation of legislation that establishes a credible process to appoint the leaderhip of the Independent Election Commission, guarantee the role of women and puts in place a capable and impartial dispute-resolution mechanism is the essential foundation for the credibility of the election.

We support the Afghan-led peace process, recognizing that reconciliation is the best way to end violence and to secure a unified and sovereign Afghanistan. With President Karzai, we continue to call upon the Taliban to join an Afghan political process. As President Obama has said, the opening of a Taliban office in Qatar is an important first step. While there may be bumps in the road, the fact that the parties have an opportunity to talk and discuss Afghanistan's future is very important.

With regard to the events related to the opening of the office this week, last January President Karzai and President Obama jointly called on the Government of Qatar to facilitate an office in Doha for the purposes of negotiations between the Afghan High Peace Council and the authorized representatives of the Taliban. The

United States supports the opening of the political office of the Afghan Taliban for that purpose. As we made clear yesterday, we do not recognize the name "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" and are pleased that Qatar has clarified that the name of the office is the "Political Office of the Afghan Taliban" and has had the sign with the incorrect name in front of the door taken down. We have underscored that the office must not be treated or represent itself as an embassy or other office representing the Afghan Taliban as an emirate, Government or sovereign.

The United States believes strongly that no nation can achieve sustainable peace, reconciliation, stability and economic growth if half the population is marginalized. The United States will continue to stand strongly with Afghanistan's women to protect advance their hard-won gains. Furthermore, Afghanistan's economic transition will ensure that the security and political transitions both succeed.

Critical reforms are still necessary to achieve economic prosperity and to integrate Afghanistan into the regional economy. We welcome President Karzai's continued commitment to effect those reforms and will work with all stakeholders to achieve that goal. We also welcome Afghanistan's continued engagement with its neighbours. The third ministerial conference on the Istanbul Process, held on 26 April in Almaty, was encouraging and we commend China for its offer to host the 2014 conference.

The United Nations must play a central role as Afghanistan goes through those three important transitions. Most critical is UNAMA's leadership in continuing to provide support to ensure that the 2014 Afghan presidential election proceeds as planned. UNAMA's support for regional diplomacy and the political process, in coordination between the Government of Afghanistan and donors, in implementing the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework will also be a key part of the preparations as Afghanistan looks towards 2014.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing. My thanks also go to Ambassador Zair Tanin of Afghanistan for his statement.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Government and people of Afghanistan and the support of the international community, preparations for the 2014 election in Afghanistan are moving ahead steadily. The building of the Afghan National Security Forces is on track and they will assume overall responsibility for national security.

While working actively to develop the economy and improve lives, Afghanistan is also actively working to develop close international relations and cooperation. China welcome the positive progress achieved in the peace and reconstruction process. At present, Afghanistan faces complex challenges and finds itself in a critical transition stage. That requires that the Afghan Government and the international community adopt an integrated strategy. In that connection, China supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconstruction process as part of a continued effort to promote peace and reconstruction and achieve lasting peace, stability and development at an early date. I wish to emphasize the following four points.

First, a successful election in 2014 is essential to strengthening Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction. China welcomes the positive progress achieved in the preparations for the election and hopes that all Afghan parties will put the interests of the nation above all else by properly settling their differences with regard to electoral law, so as to guarantee the smooth conduct the election. We appreciate the assistance provided by the parties concerned for the election and hope that the international community's support will play a positive role to ensure a smooth transition process in Afghanistan.

Secondly, a stable security situation is key for a smooth transition in Afghanistan. The recent frequent terrorist attacks have increased civilian casualties. China expresses its concern in that regard. All parties should comply with international humanitarian law and other relevant international law and carry out their responsibilities for the protection of civilians. When handing over responsibility for security, the parties concerned should adopt a responsible, prudent and progressive approach and give priority to the capacity-building of the Afghan security sector.

Thirdly, national reconstruction must be led by the Government and people of Afghanistan. China has always supported national reconciliation led and owned by all Afghans, and we welcome the positive progress achieved in that regard. At the same time, the international community should respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, on the basis of respect for the will of the

Government and people of Afghanistan, continue to provide the necessary assistance for reconciliation and work together to achieve an Afghanistan governed by Afghans at an early date.

Fourthly, in order to achieve lasting stability and development, the international community must provide sustained attention and support. The relevant parties in the international community should honour their commitments to providing assistance to Afghanistan, support the country in an effort to implement a national development strategy and improve Afghans' own capacity for development.

China supports Afghanistan in an effort to develop good neighbourliness with countries of the region and to work together to respond to regional threats and challenges. China supports the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to improve communication and coordination with the Government of Afghanistan and hopes that UNAMA will continue to play a central coordinating role in helping Afghanistan.

China has always been a good neighbour to Afghanistan and committed itself to developing good neighbourliness. China places great importance on, and takes an active part in, peaceful reconstruction. China is ready to join the rest of the international community in its continued effort to provide all assistance within its capacity and to play a positive role in achieving lasting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Sharifov (Azerbaijan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing on the latest situation in Afghanistan, as well as Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his comprehensive statement.

We highly appreciate the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in promoting peace and stability in the country and assisting the Afghan Government in the realization of its priorities, especially in light of the challenges of the transition process. We underline the necessity adequate funding of the Mission in order to enable it to effectively carry out the tasks mandated by resolution 2096 (2013).

Since the Council last considered the issue in March (see S/PV.6935), Afghanistan has continued to progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the transition period, which is to be completed by the end of 2014. We positively assess the Government's increasing assertion of ownership over peace and reconciliation in the country, as well as the ongoing efforts by the High Peace Council and its work with political parties and civil society. UNAMA's support for the Council's activities, the implementation of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme and the regional dialogue is critical in advancing a broad and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process as a basis for overall stabilization and durable peace in the country.

In general, the implementation of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework requires the Government and the international community to undertake a vigorous and sustained engagement in order to deliver on their respective commitments. We note with concern that, compared with last year, security-related incidents, such as unabated armed clashes, insurgent attacks and the use of improvised explosive devices, have increased, including in areas under the control of the Afghan security forces.

In this period, two reprehensible attacks by anti-Government elements also took place against United Nations-affiliated organizations and other humanitarian actors. It is incumbent on all parties in Afghanistan to take maximum measures to avoid civilian casualties. Insurgents must renounce their tactic of targeting civilians, which contravenes religious and humanitarian tenets and seriously undermines the ongoing reconciliation efforts. We hope that the incipient contacts between the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Taliban will help reverse the current situation.

The country's stability requires full-fledged cooperation between Afghanistan, its neighbours and other counterparts on a wide spectrum of issues, including peace and reconciliation, regional security challenges, development and humanitarian assistance.

We welcome Afghanistan's increased interaction with its various partners within the bilateral and multilateral frameworks. As we have noted previously, the Istanbul Heart of Asia process is a unique regional platform for dialogue and partnership aimed at promoting security, confidence and cooperation. The adoption of the implementation plans of all confidence-building measures at the Almaty ministerial conference on 26 April marked the conclusion of the first phase and a shift towards more practical steps within each confidence-building measures. It is essential that these

plans be implemented in a timely, effective and result-oriented manner, including through the development of concrete projects, by securing necessary funding and through the continued engagement of supporting countries and organizations.

Azerbaijan strongly supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unity of Afghanistan. We stand by the Government of Afghanistan and the proud Afghan people in their legitimate aspiration to become a self-sustaining country. In our bilateral relations, we will continue to attach high priority to assisting Afghanistan through the implementation of existing programmes and the elaboration of new capacity-building and training programmes. My country will continue to be a part of the international efforts in Afghanistan. In the post-2014 period, we will remain actively engaged within the Istanbul Heart of Asia process, and stand ready to contribute in the framework of other regional initiatives.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his briefing today, as well as for his activities undertaken as the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Tanin, for his statement.

Luxembourg fully endorses the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

The international community's attention is turned towards late 2014, when Afghanistan will assume full responsibility for its territory and its sovereignty. The process leading to the full transfer or handover to the Afghan forces for security is strewn of obstacles, but a decisive stride forward was taken this week with the Government's taking control of security in all districts of Afghanistan.

Beyond security matters, today's discussion is an opportunity to take a look at the political dimensions of the transition process. I should like to focus my statements on three major challenges to be tackled to ensure a successful political transition.

The first challenge is the presidential and provincial elections of 5 April 2014, when it will be vital for the successful political transition that the legitimacy of the election results not be questioned. This means ensuring credible and transparent elections that are open to everyone. That is why we call on the Afghan Government to implement an adequate electoral framework as quickly as possible, including the adoption of an electoral law, the appointment of the head of the Independent Election Commission, the establishment of an impartial body for the management of complaints, and guaranteeing the independence of the Commission. It also means guaranteeing the participation of women in the elections in line with the commitments undertaken a year ago in the agreed Tokyo Framework.

Another decisive step forward is national reconciliation. If it is to succeed, the peace process must be borne on the shoulders of Afghans themselves because only inter-Afghan reconciliation will pave the way for a sustainable end to violence. We note the announcement made on 18 June in Doha on the opening of a Taliban office, and we hope that this will be a platform for peace negotiations and a democratic Afghanistan. Aware that inter-Afghan reconciliation also depends on the support of neighbours, we recall the important role of regional players in ensuring a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

The third challenge is in the area of human rights. The stability of Afghan society will also hinge on the extent to which the fundamental rights of civilians are upheld. Important measures have been taken in that regard, but much remains to be done. Greater commitment was undertaken in Tokyo last year and recalled in resolution 2096 (2013) on the the full implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Afghan Government is responsible for upholding this commitment.

We also share the strong concern of the Secretary-General regarding the 25-per cent rise in civilian casualties during the reporting period. We most firmly condemn indiscriminate attacks perpetrated against civilians.

As 2014 approaches, many tasks remain to be completed, but Afghanistan has one major advantage in meeting its challenges — the youthfulness of its population, of whom 65 per cent is under 25 years. This human capital must be nurtured and protected. In particular with respect to children, we believe that the ongoing support of the United Nations and the Afghan Government is necessary to reviving the dynamic created on 30 January 2011 with the signing of the action plan against the recruitment and use of children in the Afghan security forces.

In that context, it is most important that UNAMA keep its Office for the Protection of Children open in order to effectively help the Afghan authorities in implementing the action plan and generally speaking in the efforts to protect children, as well as to allocate the necessary capacities and expertise in line with the provisions of resolution 2096 (2013).

In conclusion, I would like to express my delegation's strong support for United Nations efforts to help the Afghan Government in combating the increasing poppy cultivation. The efforts required of the Afghan Government need the international community's firm backing. The United Nations and the Security Council in particular must remain committed in that regard.

Mr. Bouchaara (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing and presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/350) on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's activities in Afghanistan. I also thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement.

The Secretary-General's report notes the most recent developments in Afghanistan over the past three months. In the reporting period, significant political developments have taken place in light of the provincial and presidential elections, the end of the International Security Assistance Force's presence in 2014, and the beginning of a new phase of transformation for the country. In that regard, the technical and political preparations for the elections continue, in particular the adoption of the elctoral budget, negotiations among the various political parties, and the launch by the Independent Election Commission of electoral maps while awaiting the forthcoming appointment of the head of the Commission.

In order to attenuate tensions in many Afghan provinces, it is important for UNAMA to organize workshops on mediation and conflict settlement so as to raise awareness among local peoples and religious leaders regarding the importance of using peaceful means for the settlement of conflict. The Afghan Government also made efforts during this period to implement national priority programmes and a number of actions pursuant to commitments undertaken in Tokyo.

On the security front, a number of difficulties remain. The number of incidents affecting civilians rose compared to the previous period, as did the sophistication of explosives and methods used in that context. It must also be noted that between 1 February and 30 April, UNAMA recorded more than 533 civilian deaths and more than 800 injured civilians, which also represents an increase from the same period in the previous year. At the same time, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme continued its expansion, which is positive. We welcome the decision taken to extend from three to six months the assistance provided under the Programme to ex-combatants.

Afghanistan is part of a region facing significant difficulties but where there is also great potential for regional cooperation. The leaders of Afghanistan are participating in several such regional initiatives, including the ministerial meeting on dialogue and cooperation in Asia. Afghanistan was also on the agenda at the trilateral meeting between the Russian Federation, China and Pakistan, and at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting. Those meetings can help the parties not only to strengthen the links between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, but also to work together to tackle a number of challenges, including drug trafficking and terrorism, and strengthen cooperation in the areas of energy, investment and infrastructure.

Afghanistan is at a historic turning point, marked by the presidential and provincial elections of 2014 and the planned withdrawal of international troops before the end of 2014. It is important to continue providing the country with financial assistance to help it meet the challenges it faces. The international community must remain committed to that process through UNAMA, whose crucially important role and activities must be supported.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): We pay tribute to the United Nations Mission of Assistance in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its important work under the dynamic leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš. It needs the Council's continued support and greater resources.

We have heard the perspective of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Zahir Tanin. The people of Pakistan consider the people of Afghanistan their brothers and sisters. Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif has declared Pakistan's commitment to strengthening ties with Afghanistan covering the entire spectrum of political, economic, defence, educational and cultural relations. Pakistan's

newly elected leadership has reiterated its resolve to fully support Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and national reconciliation processes. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are a key constituent of Pakistan's foreign policy, which is supported by all State institutions. The success of that policy requires reciprocity, trust and good will.

We thank the United States Government for acknowledging publically Pakistan's genuine and constructive support for the Afghan peace process. Over the past 10 years, the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and other countries have paid a high price in blood and resources. All of those efforts and sacrifices should not have been in vain. The people of Afghanistan must succeed and we must succeed with them.

I thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his statement that the Government of Afghanistan looks forward to working with the new Government in Pakistan. We will respond in full measure. We respect Afghanistan's sovereignty and support its Government's efforts to uphold it. I reject most emphatically — root, trunk and branch — Ambassador Tanin's argument that terrorist sanctuaries exist in Pakistan and that some elements continue to use terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy. That is not true, and he knows it. This is not good diplomacy. By using such arguments, he casts aspersions on our sincerity. In Pakistan, we operate not as elements but as a whole, as a State. All institutions of the State are in consensus that terrorism is a threat to both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and therefore both countries should work together to eliminate this scourge.

I have not rebutted Ambassador Tanin's argument as a tit-for-tat response or to settle scores; I have said what I have to highlight that terrorists operate on both sides of the porous border. Many attacks against Pakistan are planned on Afghanistan's soil. That is why we need more aggressive policing and surveillance of the border. This would also help to stop the shelling. We must not allow terrorists to manipulate and divide the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This kind of contentious polemic is disingenuous as Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to communicate through multiple political and military channels to address all bilateral issues.

Pakistan's own stability and prosperity depend on peace and security in Afghanistan. This sense of shared destiny drives our ties with Afghanistan. Stability in Afghanistan will also usher in a new era of cooperation and connectivity in the region. We must build political trust. The joint commission chaired by Pakistan's Prime Minister and the President of Afghanistan is the best forum for pursuing this objective. The tripartite commission comprising Pakistan, Afghanistan and the International Security Assistance Force met earlier this month Rawalpindi to discuss border controls and coordination along the international border. The stability and sanctity of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is a shared responsibility. The robust deployment of Pakistani troops on our side is meant to interdict terrorist and criminals. For optimum results, this must be matched from the other side. Bilateral channels, including military and intelligence contacts, to resolve issues relating to the border posts should be made more effective and any misunderstandings addressed through real-time communication and dialogue.

We assure the Secretary-General that Pakistan is doing its utmost to build trust and prevent confrontation. We agree with him that enflamed public sentiment is not at all helpful.

Two days ago, three very significant developments took place. Afghan security forces formally took over security leadership, the Taliban opened an office in Doha and announced their readiness to negotiate. We congratulate the Government and people of Afghanistan on the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan forces. Pakistan welcomed the opening of a Taliban office in Doha and the announcement of talks between the United States, the Taliban and the Afghan Government. After several initiatives, this was surely a flicker of hope for peace in Afghanistan. Subsequently, problems arose. We hope that in the greater interests of Afghanistan, misgivings can be removed and tensions defused. This is a time for diplomacy and statesmanship. A compromise must be explored to move forward.

We have urged an early end to the war. The conflict in Afghanistan can be resolved only through a negotiated settlement. Pakistan has released a number of Taliban prisoners in good faith and after giving prior intimation to the Afghan authorities. We hope that this measure will facilitate the peace process.

We wish the people of Afghanistan success as they negotiate wrenching but momentous political, security and economic transitions. We should work to avert an economic vacuum after the withdrawal of international

forces. Donors must fulfil their pledges in accordance with the Mutual Accountability Framework.

Finally, Pakistan supports the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. The United Nations should prepare itself to play an even more significant role after 2014 in promoting institution-building, economic self-sufficiency, peace and reconciliation, counter-narcotics efforts and the rehabilitation of refugees. In that context, the good offices and political outreach of the United Nations are critical.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for their statements. I also align myself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

I congratulate the Afghan authorities on assuming the responsibility for security in the country on 18 June. That was an important step forward and demonstrated that Afghanistan is on the path to reassuming full sovereignty. The Afghan National Security Forces are now able independently to defend the entire Afghan population against attacks by armed terrorist groups. The international coalition will now play only a support role in those efforts.

Only a genuine, inclusive inter-Afghan political process will guarantee the emergence of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. France stands ready to support that process, as it has in the past, including through using levers such as the sanctions regime of the Security Council. The dialogue must be led by Afghans, in line with principles they themselves have defined and endorsed by the international community in Bonn on 5 December 2011, and by the Security Council. These principles include renouncing violence, breaking ties with international terrorism, and upholding the Afghan Constitution, particularly in terms of women's rights.

In that context, my delegation has taken note of the public announcement recently made concerning the official opening of an office representing the Taliban, in Doha. We hope that the office will contribute to establishing inter-Afghan political dialogue, which would promote progress in establishing peace in the country.

Nevertheless, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/350) notes the worrisome increase in civilian victims, particularly children, which is obviously unacceptable. Attacks on humanitarian workers, including from the International Committee of the Red Cross, have also increased. The report also recalls that the Taliban has been responsible for the majority of civilian casualties, which demonstrates that group's lack of concern for human life.

The friendship between France and Afghanistan is deeply rooted in a shared past, as we celebrated last year 90 years of diplomatic ties. Since our armed forces withdrew from Afghanistan late last year, a new step forward has been taken in our bilateral relations, based on strengthened civilian and military cooperation under the framework of our friendship and cooperation treaty dealing with the allied forces and the civilians. Our aid will reach nearly €300 million in 2012-2016, representing a 50 per cent increase in our assistance envelope, in order to assist the country in moving from a war economy to one of peace.

The international community, having been offered a series of guarantees, has committed to continuing its support to Afghanistan during the transformation decade. The presidential elections of 5 April 2014 and the legislative elections of 2015 will demonstrate, in that context, a decisive step forward in Afghan democracy and long-term support for Afghanistan, in line with the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

We call on the Afghan authorities to convene credible, inclusive and transparent elections and to accelerate the adoption of an appropriate legislative framework to define dynamic anti-corruption measures, and to guarantee the independence of the Independent Election Commission. Like the Secretary-General, we call on the authorities to swiftly adopt structural and electoral legislation and to appoint a consensus-based individual to head the Commission.

Next year will see the end of the international community's military commitment, which took the form of a combat mission created in response to the attack on the United States of 11 September 2001. We hope that the year will also be one of political transition for Afghanistan and strengthened democracy.

Mr. Oyarzábal (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): To start, I wish to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kubiš for his briefing, and Ambassador Tanin for his important contribution.

Afghanistan is moving steadily forward in preparing for the political and security transition to be completed in 2014. Only two days ago, an historic landmark was

reached when the Afghan forces assumed responsibility for security throughout the land for the first time since 2001. We welcome that important step on the road to full sovereignty. In parallel, over the next few weeks, the country's politicians will be taking important decisions aimed at creating a legal framework to guarantee the convening of credible elections that will be accepted by the entire Afghan population. That will mark the beginning of a new phase in the strengthening of democracy in Afghanistan.

Together with such progress, my country believes that a transition ensuring that Afghans will be fully responsible for their future and their destiny must also generate the conditions necessary to enable the country to free itself of its dependence on donors and to work towards independent economic development, within a framework of regional cooperation and integration. Along those lines, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/350) offers a comprehensive overview of the circumstances of the transition, the goals achieved and the challenges that remain.

Many aspects are covered in the report. While acknowledging the importance of all, I would like on this occasion to emphasize just a few.

First, on security, we acknowledge the progress made in the professionalization and capacity-building of the Afghan forces to enable them to deal with security issues. At the same time, we must voice our deep concern at the number of civilians who continue to be killed in armed conflict. The figures show that the situation remains far from resolved; instead, it has worsened. An about-turn is required so that the Afghan people can have full confidence in the protection provided by its own security forces in the long term. In our view, it is important to join the appeals to the anti-Government forces that are responsible for the highest number of victims to end their indiscriminate attacks against civilians. They must scrupulously respect the difference between combatants and civilians, which is clearly established under international law. It should not be manipulated to justify acts that constitute war crimes.

Secondly, after more than a decade of conflict, it is clear that Afghanistan's long-term stability demands a negotiated peace emerging from a political process to end the violence. Any initiative must be led and conducted by Afghans themselves. We therefore support the endeavours and role of the High Peace Council of Afghanistan in creating favourable conditions to enable the process to take place. We trust that the principal national and international actors will overcome their differences, which have made progress difficult in efforts to open effective channels of dialogue with the Taliban.

Thirdly, we welcome the progress made in the past decade in gender equality and women's empowerment in Afghanistan. However, both in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict (S/2013/149) and in reviewing certain recent developments related to the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, we are reminded that the goals that have been achieved have not been secured. Maintaining and firmly establishing those achievements is not only a human rights imperative; it must also be a strategic priority of the transition to ensure the full participation of women at all levels and in all economic sectors. It is an essential element in building solid economies and strengthening stable and equitable societies.

Under its Government's leadership and with the driving force of its people and the support of the international community, Afghanistan has travelled a long road and is preparing to embark on a new phase of independence and sovereignty. Through its presence and ability to interact with every sector of Afghan political and social life, UNAMA has played a fundamental role in helping to reach this moment that will be even more vital as the transition progresses. We would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all his staff and urge them to continue their important work.

Mr. Manzi (Rwanda): I thank you for organizing this important debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. President. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his in-depth briefing on the Secretary-General's report (S/2013/350), and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement.

Despite a number of changes that have occurred in the transitional process in Afghanistan, Rwanda recognizes the tremendous progress achieved so far. While the transition there is beset by multiple challenges, including insecurity, economic hurdles, illicit drug cultivation and a difficult humanitarian situation, it is important to reflect on the progress that

has been made towards a stable political and economic transition. Rwanda welcomes the formal transfer of responsibility from the United States-led NATO troops to the Afghan authorities. The official launch of the fifth and final stage of the security transition is a demonstration of faith in the Afghan security forces. That is indeed a milestone in the process of withdrawal from the country; however, we urge NATO and other partners in peace to continue to support the Afghan forces through enhancing their capacity in terms of training and equipment, in order to safeguard the gains made in the past 12 years.

The upcoming presidential and provincial council elections in 2014 will be a major opportunity for the Afghan authorities to translate their commitments into concrete achievements. If Afghanistan is to pursue stability and infuse the prospects of the post-2014 scenario with new optimism, there must be a credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process. We encourage the Afghan Government, with the support of its partners, including UNAMA, to lay a solid foundation for free and fair elections, and to spare no effort to achieve the broadest possible consensus on the rules of the game. We believe that engaging opposition groups, civil society and all relevant stakeholders in general will prove fruitful. The only way to foster participation is to make the process more inclusive and ensure that its outcome is legitimate. Successful and credible elections in Afghanistan are essential to stability and lasting peace.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the rate at which civilian deaths have been increasing, by 25 per cent compared to the same period last year. We strongly condemn all acts of terror and those that target innocent civilians. We therefore urge the Afghan Government to put in place both political and military measures aimed at protecting civilians.

Combating the narcotics trade is a cross-cutting issue that should be tackled in a holistic way. Opium production in Afghanistan has posed a threat to the stability of the region and the overall security situation. We welcome the Afghan Government's commitment to combating this scourge; but while it cannot succeed alone, it is possible with regional cooperation and international engagement. We therefore support the comprehensive approach led by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime aimed not only at eradicating poppy production but also at dealing with related areas, such as development and law enforcement.

The international community has given its assurance that it will stand by Afghanistan through the transition process and beyond in the transition decade. The 2012 Tokyo Conference donors made pledges of around $16 billion, and we call on them to raise their commitments. We urge the Afghan Government to ensure good governance and to strengthen its anti-corruption measures, as indicated in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. We would like to express our ongoing support for UNAMA in the expectation that it will continue to play an essential role in supporting the stabilization of Afghanistan, and to that end, the Security Council should ensure that the Mission's mandate remains up to the tasks ahead.

I would like to conclude by voicing our strong belief that the United Nations will continue to play a crucial role in the transition process. The gradual downsizing of the international military coalition will test the Afghanistan's governing capacity at the national and subregional levels. At this critical time, we believe strongly that UNAMA has a vital role to play in leading and coordinating the efforts of the international community.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome Mr. Ján Kubiš and thank him for his briefing on the Secretary-General's report, contained in document S/2013/350. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement. I wish to make the following comments.

First, we take note of the recent developments discussed in the report. The current situation in Afghanistan is fraught with enormous challenges, and its ability to overcome them will depend largely on the success of the 2014 elections. We commend Afghans' determination to hold the presidential elections in accordance with their Constitution. We are also pleased with the technical preparations for the elections and the recent publication of a draft operational plan and indicative budget.

However, considering that the elections are less than a year away, we are concerned that no legislation has been enacted creating an electoral framework, particularly independent electoral institutions. The international community will be evaluating the elections not only based on who is elected but on how they are elected, and on whether the Afghan people accept the results as legitimate. We think that Afghanistan should agree to international assistance and work with

UNAMA in order to strengthen the integrity of the electoral process.

Secondly, the reconciliation process is also at a crucial point. The Security Council has repeatedly recognized the fact that there is no exclusively military solution that can assure Afghanistan's stability; neither have the military operations produced the decisive results that were hoped for. In that regard, we believe that Afghan-led reconciliation is the only way to end the conflict and bring about lasting peace. We therefore support the work of the High Peace Council. We hope that all parties will take steps to eliminate the obstacles to renewing the peace negotiations. The recent establishment in Doha of an office for representatives of the Taliban, on the terms explained by Ambassador Tanin, should also facilitate that process.

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme and the regional dialogue are also important elements for promoting a unified vision of the peaceful future of the country among all Afghans.

Thirdly, we welcome the announcement made two days ago on the fifth tranche completing the transfer of security tasks to Afghans. That is a historic milestone, and we trust that with unwavering international support, the capacities of the Afghan forces will continue to increase. Transition means a return of sovereignty to the Afghan people. We have therefore noted with interest the recent approval by NATO defence ministers of the concept of a post-2014 mission. We await with interest the details of that concept, in particular as concerns the renewal of the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan in October.

Fourthly, we are concerned at the fact that with respect to the protection of civilians, the current context of the transition has been marked by a higher level of significant incidents. We deplore the new figures showing that the number of civilian casualties has increased by 25 per cent over this quarter. We appeal to all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. Moreover, measures must urgently be implemented aimed at ensuring that internally displaced persons are able to seek protection and access to humanitarian assistance.

Fifthly, we must firmly defend human rights and promote development. We strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls. It is imperative to safeguard the goals of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, in line with the international commitments entered into by Afghanistan.

Lastly, Afghanistan has a special place on the United Nations agenda. Now more than ever, the role of the Organization is of paramount importance given Afghanistan's chronic vulnerability and the repercussions of the transition. We continue to support a solid United Nations presence so as to ensure that Afghanistan is prepared and able adequately to face up to 2014 and its aftermath.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I should like to start by thanking Mr. Ján Kubiš for having presented the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the country (S/2013/350). We thank also Ambassador Tanin for his statement.

In this second review of the situation in Afghanistan for the current year, we note in the report of the Secretary-General that the country remains in the grip of violence and instability, notwithstanding the fact that some progress has been noted. The security situation remains of concern, as reflected in the increased number of attacks against national and international institutions in recent weeks; the latest, on 18 June, targeted a Shiite deputy during the course of an official ceremony marking the last phase of the transfer of responsibility for security in the country to Afghan forces.

Such attacks have resulted in many casualties among the civilian population, including many children recruited primarily to carry out attacks. The attacks represent serious violations of the rights of children, which Togo has unremittingly condemned, as it did on 17 June during our debate on the plight of children caught up in armed conflict (see S/PV.6980).

We commend the special country team for its support for the Afghan Government in the context of the implementation of the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment. However, that plan cannot be implemented by just one party. It must also involve the Taliban and other groups affiliated with Al-Qaida.

We also appreciate the efforts being made to strengthen the protection of women. Discussions in Parliament must be speeded up so that the amendments aimed at strengthening provisions on women's rights can be adopted. The role of UNESCO, which is working

tirelessly for the education of women and girls, must be strengthened in that regard.

The combat against drug trafficking remains a major challenge for the Afghan authorities inasmuch as there has been an increase in poppy cultivation for the third consecutive year. Regrettably, the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations have noted that there is a close relationship between insecurity, lack of support for agriculture and poppy cultivation. Nonetheless, we congratulate the Afghan Government on the initiatives it has taken to combat the scourge of narcotics in several provinces, which have made it possible to eradicate more than 5,000 hectares of poppies.

It goes without saying that drug trafficking finances terrorism and fuels conflict. We therefore encourage the United Nations to continue its efforts to finalize, within the set time frame, a road map for the promotion of more effective action on money laundering.

Afghanistan has started a political transition that will culminate in the general elections in 2014. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the success of this political transition will depend on the legitimacy of those who will be taking the reins of power. Here it is important that all Afghan parties undertake to use compromise solutions and to reach an understanding on a consultative mechanism for the appointment of the members of the electoral bodies, in particular the Chair of the Independent Election Commission. We appreciate the continued support of the United Nations Development Programme, UNAMA, the media and civil society in that respect.

On the question of national dialogue, we hope that the opening on June 18 last of a Taliban office in Doha will give impetus to the national dialogue and the peace process with a view to bringing about the stabilization of the country.

However, Afghanistan will experience real stability only if the States of the region and the international community as a whole are willing to make sacrifices to help it in its quest for peace and the exercise of its full sovereignty. The support of UNAMA is vital in that respect, and it is therefore key to provide it with the appropriate resources.

To conclude, I reiterate the gratitude of my country to the United Nations, to UNAMA and all of its staff, and to United Nations funds and programmes for their praiseworthy efforts to ensure a better future for Afghanistan.

Mr. Pankin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like at the outset to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (S/2013/350).

We listened with interest to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Tanin. Unfortunately, the current situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is far from stable; the trend is towards deterioration, especially with the withdrawal of the international contingent.

There is an ongoing threat of terrorism, as reflected in the numerous terrorist attacks that have resulted in civilian casualties and the regrettable statistics contained in the Secretary-General's report. The number of civilian casualties increased by one fourth over the previous reporting period; children represented one fifth of those, with the indicator for casualties among children 27 per cent higher than last year.

In addition, there were attacks by the Taliban on State institutions and representatives of the coalition force, including through the use of suicide bombers, from January through June last year. Yesterday, we witnessed attacks by the Taliban against the Bagram air base, just 45 kilometres from the country's capital. This was a clear sign that, after the 2012 withdrawal of the foreign contingent from Badakhshan, the Afghan security forces were unable to maintain control of the province. As a result, a unit of the international contingent returned there in April.

We are concerned about the ongoing rise in terrorist activity this year, spreading from northern Afghanistan to the countries of Central Asia, which are our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In the first quarter of this year, the number of attacks on the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and governmental bodies in the north of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan rose by 25 per cent over the same period last year. In May, there was a 40-per cent rise in the number of attacks by armed fighters in the northern provinces over the same month last year. These terrorist activities seek, inter alia, at hindering the transfer of equipment for the international forces via the north. Groups affiliated with the Islamic movement

in Uzbekistan, the Union of Islamic Jihad, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Islamic Party of Afghanistan and the Taliban in those regions can have a negative impact on neighbouring Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which are also our neighbours.

The situation in the eastern border regions with Pakistan has sharply deteriorated. The ratio of ANSF soldiers to detachment extremist fighters is 10 to 15 in the province of Nuristan. That translates into only 196 soldiers against more than 200 detachments of Taliban. According to the Governor of that border province, one local district has been under Taliban control for two years and is the base for the efforts and fighters in the north-east of the country, posing the genuine risk that control will be assumed by the Taliban and spread into other provinces.

We are seeing the mobilization of armed groups wherever the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has transferred responsibilities to the Afghan forces. We remain convinced that there can be no justification for an accelerated transfer of security responsibilities of ISAF in favour of the Afghan army and police without due consideration of the reality of the situation and the military capacity of the ANSF, without which ISAF's withdrawal will surely aggravate the general situation in the country. The drawdown must be mitigated by an increase in the military capacities of the ANSF, but we have yet to see progress in that sphere.

Like many other States of the region, we cannot accept a long-standing foreign military presence in Afghanistan, which we would like to see peaceful, stable, independent and neutral. Such a foreign presence could be used to project forceful influence in the region as a whole and in third countries. Furthermore, it is changing from a deterrent to terrorism into a factor for regional instability. Following the transfer, the ISAF presence in Afghanistan will no longer be relevant. Its bases must be handed over to the ANSF, under Afghan command. Full clarity is necessary with respect to the parametres and tasks of future NATO operations in the country, which can be mandated only by the Security Council, and only once ISAF has reported to the Council on the completion of its mandate.

One important factor for improving the situation in the country is national reconciliation. In the light of the establishment of the Taliban contact office in Doha, we note that dialogue with the armed opposition will have a positive impact only if it is led by Kabul. Russia has always supported the efforts of the Afghan Government to work for national reconciliation and create conditions conducive to long-term stability, including through dialogue between the High Peace Council and representatives of the armed opposition. To that end, the strict compliance of armed fighters with the basic principles of reconciliation — laying down their arms, recognizing the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and cutting all ties with Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations — is essential.

We support the Afghan Government's approach to the principle of the establishment and functioning of the Taliban office in Doha, and call for strict compliance with the Security Council's sanctions regime, in particular the prohibition of international visits for those who figure on the sanctions list. We believe it necessary to support the sanctions regime as the most important tool of counter-terrorism with respect to individuals, groups, entities and organizations associated with the Taliban that pose a threat to peace, stability and security in Afghanistan. We will continue to work to ensure the effectiveness of the sanctions regime and the strict compliance of States with their relevant international obligations in that respect.

We remain seriously concerned over the illegal manufacture, trade and transfer of drugs from Afghanistan, which pose a threat to peace and stability. Not only does the Afghan drug threat affect countries of the region, but tens of thousands of people die every year from Afghan heroin or opium in Europe and the United States. Moreover, the illegal manufacture of and trade in these drugs lead to other crimes, including terrorism, corruption and money-laundering. In this context, we attach priority importance to the implementation of the decisions of the third ministerial conference of the Paris Pact on preventing the spread of Afghan narcotics. An important measure in that regard would be the agreed inclusion of drug traffickers on the Security Council's sanctions lists. In the interests of effectively removing the drug threat from Afghanistan, we would favour the establishment of dialogue on this matter in the format of the CSTO and NATO.

It is our view that the Istanbul process on Afghanistan is a good platform for dialogue. At the same time, we have the impression that the process is evolving slower than previously planned and that a number of participants have become entrenched

in their positions. We should therefore like to see increasingly dynamic progress in established formats, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We intend to promote the active participation of observer countries, including Afghanistan, in its practical work, particularly in discussions on countering such regional threats as drugs, terrorism and extremism.

In conclusion, I wish the people of Afghanistan every success and express our full support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in its efforts to fulfil its mandate at this most difficult time.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United Kingdom.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/350), Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his informative briefing this morning, and Ambassador Zahir Tanin for his substantive comments.

Let me begin my remarks by condemning the recent attacks in Kabul and elsewhere in the country. We have seen multiple deaths and injuries of civilians, including women and children. These attacks are reprehensible and unjustifiable.

I will focus my statement today on four key areas: security transition, the peace and reconciliation process, the 2014 elections and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

First, the United Kingdom welcomes the announcement of the fifth and final traunch of security transition, which saw the Afghan National Security Forces take lead responsibility for security across the whole country. The Afghan National Security Forces continue to grow in confidence and capability. We remain convinced that they will be ready, willing and able to effectively manage Afghanistan's security after 2014 and to tackle any residual insurgent threat.

Secondly, an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process is critical for lasting stability. In this context, the United Kingdom welcomes the opening of a Taliban political office in Doha. The understandable and legitimate concerns of the Afghan Government about this development musty be addressed. I welcome the remarks made by the representative of the United States in this regard.

Peace processes are long, complex and difficult. The Afghan peace process will be no exception. But it is right to engage the Taliban in a peace process, not least to confront them with the need to give up the armed struggle and take up a political role. The international community must do all it can to support this Afghan-led process.

Afghanistan's closest neighbours continue to have an invaluable role to play in Afghanistan's security, stability and prosperity. The United Kingdom supports the Istanbul Process and other initiatives that encourage trade, economic prosperity and security. Central to the regional effort is Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan. In the past 12 months, both sides have done much to advance the relationship and the dialogue about Afghanistan's peace process. With the new Pakistani Government in place, we encourage both sides to renew their focus on the benefits of a more trusting and mutually supportive relationship.

Thirdly, with respect to the 2014 elections, the importance of the presidential and province elections in April 2014 cannot be overstated. We have seen positive progress in recent months, but there is still much to do. We strongly urge the Afghan National Assembly to give priority to the passage of vital electoral reforms. The United Nations has an important role to play in preparations for elections. As we move closer towards our shared objective of credible, inclusive and transparent elections, UNAMA must continue to use its ongoing dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan to articulate the hopes and concerns of the international community.

Turning now to the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, it is the fundamental agreement outlining both the steps that the Government of Afghanistan needs to take to improve economic and political governance for continued progress and the commitments that the international community needs to fulfil in terms of long-term support. We reiterate our call to the Government of Afghanistan to make significant progress with respect to the Accountability Framework by the 3 July senior officials' meeting. We hope to have a productive discussion on the steps needed to get reforms adopted. That, in turn, will enable the international community to continue to work towards meeting its aid effectiveness commitments.

One issue covered by the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework is the rights of women. There have been some positive steps in the last 12 months, but there is still more to be done. In particular, the

Government of Afghanistan must continue to work to reduce the barriers that women face, including through tackling violence against women and supporting women's political participation.

In conclusion, we must not underestimate the challenges ahead. But through continued partnership between the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and the rest of the international community, we can meet our shared objective of a stable, inclusive and prosperous Afghanistan. The United Kingdom will continue to play a committed role in that shared endeavour.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council. I would like to remind speakers that they should keep their comments to four minutes or less. I shall bring down the gavel if speakers go significantly beyond that time limit. Longer statements can, as usual, be circulated in writing.

I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri (India): Let me begin with thanking the President for scheduling today's debate. I would also like to thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/350), and Mr. Ján Kubiš for his briefing. At the outset, I wish to express appreciation to Mr. Kubiš for the good work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), lest I get gavelled out by the time I get to that part of my remarks. In the light of the President's instructions, we will circulate our statement but I will still read a few extracts from it.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile, as demonstrated by a number of high-profile terrorist attacks over the last two months. We condemn those attacks in the strongest possible terms and convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan. The sharp increase in the variety, spread and intensity of attacks by the Taliban and their backers shows that the Afghan national security forces continue to require substantial assistance from the international community in addressing the security and terrorist challenges faced by Afghanistan. Concerted action is needed to isolate and root out the syndicate of terrorism, which includes elements of the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other terrorist and extremist groups. It is therefore important that the transition plan be based on the ground situation rather than a predetermined time frame.

The efforts of the international community in Afghanistan should remain focused on security, development, governance and regional and international cooperation, all of which is in alignment with the overall objectives of the Afghan Government. Those efforts alone will enable the Afghan Government to eventually assume full responsibility for and take charge of Afghanistan's destiny without outside interference.

We welcome the fact that the third ministerial conference of the Istanbul Process, held in Almaty in April 2013, renewed the international community's commitment to those objectives. India was represented by our External Affairs Minister, Mr. Salman Khurshid, who endorsed India's support for the implementation plans. India also fully supports the Heart of Asia process, which offers an invaluable opportunity to develop a joint approach on issues of mutual concern through its pillar of political consultations. The process also offers us the opportunity to fulfil the promise of regional cooperation that was identified at Istanbul, Kabul and Delhi and which was further elaborated in the deliberations on the implementation plan of the trade, commerce and investment opportunities confidence-building measure that India is leading.

Afghanistan's stability and economic development greatly depend on its neighbours and the region as a whole. We must expand, rather than hinder, trade, transit and transport ties, including overland transit and trade. That is the best way of bringing the regional dimension into play in a positive manner. Growing economic interdependence will also help in weaning disaffected youth away from insurgency and militancy and in creating a zone of shared prosperity in the region. We support the wishes of the Government of Afghanistan to take the lead in that direction.

The holding of presidential and provincial council elections, currently scheduled for 5 April 2014, will be an important step forward in strengthening the democratic framework in Afghanistan. It is also important that the ongoing transition remain Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. It must also be multifaceted, ensure the protection and promotion of the human rights of all Afghans and lead to the strengthening of the Afghan State and its institutions.

In conclusion, let me state that in the arduous journey towards lasting peace, prosperity and stability in Afghanistan, the Afghan Government needs the long-term commitment of the international community to

confront the challenges that lie ahead. As a historically close and friendly neighbour, India will continue to stand by Afghanistan through the ongoing transitions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): I would like to begin my statement by thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2013/350) and Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing.

We welcome the positive signals coming from Afghanistan. On Tuesday, Afghanistan's military assumed the top leadership role in security matters for the entire country. We have confidence that the Afghan security forces have the capacity to fulfil that challenging responsibility. Further boosting their capacities and competencies within a rule of law framework remains a key priority.

Preparations for the 5 April 2014 presidential and provincial council elections are ongoing. The appointment of the Chair of the Independent Election Commission and the adoption of relevant electoral legislation will help to build a credible framework for independent, fair and free elections. We support efforts aimed at achieving a democratic and inclusive electoral process which involves political parties and civil society, and commend, in that regard, the efforts of all relevant Afghan authorities, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Development Programme.

The successful continuation of Afghan-led peace and reconciliation efforts will constitute another important step towards security, stability and political transition. From the outset, Turkey has supported the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process with the High Peace Council at its core. We are fully aware of the difficulties and challenges of the process. We hope that different perceptions regarding the reconciliation process will be reconciled, leading to a sincere, inclusive and results-oriented dialogue.

One year after the Tokyo Conference, we are glad to see increased efforts to move on to substantive issues in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, both by the Afghan Government and the international community, to ensure the concrete implementation of mutual commitments. We look forward to the meeting of senior officials to be held on 3 July in Kabul, where the progress in meeting the goals of the Tokyo Framework will be reviewed.

Despite positive signs, major political, economic and security challenges remain. The security situation continues to be a matter of grave concern. Recent deplorable terrorist attacks have led to unacceptable human costs. Civilian casualties seem to have increased. Natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, epidemic diseases, chronic poverty and increasing internal displacement pose grave humanitarian threats. As data put forward in the report clearly indicates, the most vulnerable segments of society, especially children, women and girls, continue to be at risk. The United Nations and its partners, as well as international humanitarian bodies, seem to be under heightened threat. I strongly condemn the recent attacks on international humanitarian personnel.

As Afghanistan moves forward towards a political and security transition, we must remain in touch with those realities on the ground. The continued display of will by the international community will strengthen the hopes of the Afghan people for the future and help ensure that a smooth transition is under way. As Afghanistan's regional and international partners, we should spare no effort to contribute to the vision of a secure, peaceful and self-sufficient Afghanistan. That is in the mutual interest of all of us.

As the international presence is being reduced, the importance of regional cooperation for achieving stability, security and prosperity is being increasingly recognized. The Istanbul Process continues to gain momentum. The spirit of regional ownership, the engagement and technical support of the United Nations and its agencies, and the interest and support of the international community have made that possible. We are pleased to see the adoption of implementation plans for the six priority confidence-building measures at the third ministerial conference of the Istanbul Process, held in Almaty in April. The ministerial declaration emphasized the need for demonstrable progress in agreed activities and called for interim, ad hoc funding by participants. We would also like to welcome China's offer to host the following ministerial conference next year.

We welcome the recent trilateral meetings held on issues such as development, education, trade, investment, transportation, anti-terrorism, counter-narcotic efforts and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

We also appreciate the constructive role played by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in support of Afghanistan.

Further connectivity will facilitate economic development, stability and self-sustainability and help create a more favourable business environment in Afghanistan. We attach particular importance to the completion and maintenance of local railroad and land routes, the development of regional economic projects and the enhancement of civil aviation capabilities.

Turkey will always remain in solidarity with the Afghan people and continue to contribute to a safe, secure and prosperous Afghanistan, as we have done for many decades.

In conclusion, I would like to voice our strong belief that the United Nations will continue to play its crucial role during and after the transition. I would particularly like to commend the valuable efforts of the United Nations, and UNAMA in particular, and express our heartfelt gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kubiš and his hard-working team.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vrailas: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The acceding country Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement, the full version of which is being circulated in the Chamber and will be posted on our website.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2013/350) and Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing.

We were greatly saddened by the recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. The EU condemns such cowardly attacks on humanitarian organizations and children. We support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to create a secure environment in which the people of Afghanistan can live without the fear of terrorism and violence.

We welcome the announcements of this week that signal the potential for a better future for Afghanistan. The announcement of the final stage of the transition process highlights the progress made in the competence and effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces.

The EU welcomes the convening of the presidential and provincial council elections due to take place on 5 April 2014. We strongly urge the Afghan authorities to continue to prioritize preparations for the elections, based on the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and credibility. In particular, it is important to put in place an electoral legal framework consistent with the Constitution, with credible measures to prevent fraud and overseen by independent bodies. Accordingly, the Government of Afghanistan is urged to speed up the legislative process and engage in earnest in bringing that work to a successful conclusion. The EU is assisting in the preparations of the elections through technical advice to the Independent Election Commission and as one of the major funders of the electoral assistance programme led by the United Nations Development Programme.

The international conference held in Tokyo last year reaffirmed the partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. The full implementation of reforms, in particular on elections, financial transparency, the rule of law and human rights, especially the rights of women, as well as continued efforts to combat corruption, remains paramount in achieving a successful transition and long-term transformation in Afghanistan.

We look forward to reviewing the progress made by Afghanistan and the international community in that regard at the meeting of senior officials to be held on 3 July in Kabul. The EU believes that the Government needs to implement the following measures as a matter of absolute urgency ahead of the meeting. First, the electoral legislative framework should be adopted so the elections are governed by law, the status of the Independent Election Commission is regularized and a credible electoral complaints mechanism is established. Secondly, the Chief Justice should be appointed in accordance with the Constitution. Thirdly, the mining law, which is so important for attracting investment, should be enacted.

Credible and sustained action is also required to implement the statutory safeguards, most notably the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, that strengthen human rights in Afghanistan, in particular the rights of women. The EU attaches great

importance to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Afghanistan also needs to take systemic action to advance judicial reform. The failure of the Government of Afghanistan to develop a working justice system plays into the hands of insurgents and those who would resort to summary justice.

An effective justice system and police force are critical to the rule of law in Afghanistan and something the EU is supporting, inter alia, through its support for police reform and the justice sector. We are glad to announce that, on 27 May, the Council of the European Union extended the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan until 31 December 2014.

The EU welcomes the outcomes of the third Heart of Asia ministerial conference, held in Almaty. The Istanbul Process has brought about important measures aimed at building confidence and increasing cooperation and inclusive sustainable development across the region. The EU supports endeavours on the part of the Heart of Asia countries to continue strengthening intra-regional trust.

We are currently in the final phase of negotiating the cooperation agreement for partnership and development, which will form the basis of EU-Afghan relations for the next 10 years. We are also in the early stages of putting in place the foundations for our development cooperation through 2020. Those are clear indications of the long-term commitment of the EU and its member States to support Afghanistan through a comprehensive approach that ensures synergies between political, security and development engagement.

The President: I now give the floor to the represenative of Japan.

Mr. Umemoto (Japan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his informative briefing. I also appreciate Ambassador Tanin's comprehensive statement.

At the outset, I wish to express our deepest regret and condolences at the loss of many lives, both military and civilian, during the recent brutal attacks by anti-Government groups. We are also gravely shocked by the assault against the International Committee for the Red Cross which has sought to help Afghan for years. Japan condemns these terrorist attacks in the strongest possible terms and reaffirms its full determination to contribute to the Afghan Government and the international community's response in stopping this cycle of violence.

Despite the dire security climate, we have all witnessed the increased competence and confidence of the Afghan National Security Forces in responding to these incidents. We welcome the progress made by the Afghan authorities in taking the lead for security across the country, as well as the announcement of the final tranche of the security transition. Challenges in the field of security remain and are daunting, but we have no choice but to remain united and steadfast in our efforts.

We cannot overemphasize the crucial importance of the meeting of senior officials to be held on 3 July, which will serve as a transparent instrument to help us realize our mutual commitments made at the Tokyo Conference in July 2012. The concept of mutuality is the key. Japan has already implemented $1.4 billion of assistance out of $3 billion pledged at the Tokyo Conference last July. We acknowledge the intense efforts made by the Afghan Government in preparing this first follow-up meeting.

At the same time, some urgent issues that constitute the core of the Afghan Government's commitments remain to be addressed. A basic electoral architecture must be in place as soon as possible to guarantee fair and credible presidential and provincial elections in April 2014. Corruption continues to be a major concern that undermines the legitimacy of the State. If the international community is to uphold its commitment made under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, it is incumbent on the Afghan Government to move forward in a constructive manner, including by resolving the Kabul bank case fairly and rapidly. The full implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women is another key Government commitment.

We believe that all the road maps leading to a stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan can be realized only when accompanied by the constructive involvement of all regional actors, meeting both in multilateral and bilateral frameworks. In that regard, Japan welcomes the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the Istanbul process in Almaty in April. Japan, as a country supporting confidence-building measures on disaster management, is pleased to share its own experience in this area and to contribute to this regional initiative.

Needless to say, Afghan-Pakistan dialogue and good-neighbourly relations are vital to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. It is our strong hope that the new leadership of Pakistan and the Afghan Government will further consolidate the mutual trust and respect necessary to eliminate tensions over the border areas and create further positive momentum for promoting the Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process.

Finally, the peace and reconciliation process is the predominant task at hand in order to achieve security and political stability in Afghanistan. Japan welcomes the opening of Qatar office by the Taliban and expects it to result in the early start of reconciliation negotiations and a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The international community must remain united alongside Afghanistan until peace dividends are delivered to all Afghans.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Ragaglini (Italy) I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2013/350) and Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing.

Italy fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

As we are all aware, Afghanistan is experiencing a very important moment. The beginning of the fifth and last phase of the transition process has been announced. The Afghan Government and security forces are preparing to take over responsibility for security operations throughout the country. The Afghan people will increasingly assume ownership of its future. Thus, we are at a very delicate moment, characterized by a particularly intense fighting season that forces us to remain vigilant. We know that the handover process for security responsibilities to the national authorities could involve some critical factors, but we are also confident of the Afghan armed forces' determination to tackle this important challenge.

Italy will continue to assist Afghanistan and to encourage a greater commitment from the international community as a whole. Starting in 2015, during the so-called transformation decade, a new partnership will be formed that will lead our presence in the field to shift its focus mainly to training activities.

Afghanistan is about to face another crucial challenge — the presidential elections. We expect the Afghan authorities to take all the necessary steps to guarantee an inclusive, transparent and credible process, and to enact clear, shared rules that will guarantee the participation of the many components of civil society and the various political parties in the country.

Let us not forget the more general mutual commitments made at the Tokyo Conference in July 2012, which should guide our future cooperation. In confirming our presence in Afghanistan, we encourage the Government of Kabul to honour its commitments in the field of governance, the fight against corruption, and the protection of human rights in a framework of conditionality and measurable results.

Italy attaches great importance to the protection of women's rights and the promotion of the status of women in Afghanistan, to which the Government of Kabul made specific commitments in Tokyo, including effective and uniform enforcement of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Internal reconciliation is also an unavoidable crossroads on the path to the lasting stabilization of the country. Italy supports the peace process and recognizes Afghanistan's full ownership. We look forward to concrete follow-up soon. We do not expect it to reverse the gains made in civil rights and democracy, or to concessions to terrorism. Equally important is the contribution of regional actors, who are called upon to help lay the groundwork for the success of the inter-Afghan dialogue.

At the regional level we also expect to see greater cooperation and a more intense political dialogue. The developments in the Istanbul process, which Italy supports, are promising. Now we have to move forward with the practical implementation of the plans of actions approved at the ministerial meeting in Almaty last April.

I take this opportunity to express Italy's deep appreciation for the role being played by the United Nations in Afghanistan, starting with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). In the run-up to the elections, the United Nations support for the Afghan authorities will be crucial in consolidating the legitimacy and integrity of the process. UNAMA's contribution will be just as important during this delicate transition to the transformation decade, by supporting the Afghan Government institutions as they

assume a greater share of the responsibility for the socio-economic development of their country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing and comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/350) on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and for his analysis of the current situation in Afghanistan. I thank Ambassador Tanin for his statement today, as well as the Secretary-General for his report.

I would like briefly to touch upon a few points regarding the prevailing situation in Afghanistan:

First, Afghanistan is at a very sensitive juncture in its history. There is an intense focus on issues such as the security and political transitions that will culminate in 2014 with the end of the presence of international forces and the upcoming presidential election. We hope that, through the efforts of the Afghan Government and the United Nations, this process will help to better preserve and strengthen peace, stability and security in Afghanistan and the region. In that regard, we support the regional mechanisms, including the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan and the implementation of plans for six confidence-building measures, as defined for the process.

Secondly, in the area of regional cooperation, we have continued our bilateral cooperation, particularly on security matters, counter-narcotics efforts, developing projects and economic cooperation in the fields of roads, rails, energy, mining and minerals, agriculture, and so on.

Thirdly, on the return of refugees, a tripartite meeting between Iran, Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was held in Tehran on 15 and 16 January. In this meeting, we presented ways and means to encourage more safe and sustainable return of refugees, and a number of agreements were concluded. We look forward to the full implementation of those agreements. We also welcome the agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Afghanistan on 31 March to set up a team to seek joint solutions and integrated approaches for refugees. We urge the international community to continue to strengthen and expedite its efforts in creating conditions conducive to the sustainable repatriation of refugees and their full rehabilitation and reintegration in their homeland.

We welcome the beginning of the international military drawdown and look forward to the completion of that process. However, we are concerned about the increase in the loss of life and the injuries inflicted on Afghan civilians, part of which have been caused by the military operations of the international forces in Afghanistan. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General covering the period 1 February to 30 April, UNAMA documented 533 civilian deaths and 882 civilian injuries. That is a 44 per cent increase in deaths and a 16 per cent rise in civilian injuries. Attacks on civilians under any pretext and by whomsoever committed are to be condemned and must be halted.

We commend the initiatives by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Afghan authorities, in particular those relating to the elimination of opium cultivation fields. We are concerned about the prediction, as reflected in the 2013 *Opium Risk Assessment*, with regare to the possible increase in opium poppy cultivation, in particular in the north and north-east of Afghanistan. As indicated in the report, if current trends continue, the total number of opium poppy-free provinces in 2013 would drop to 14, down from 17 in 2012 and 20 in 2010. We are sure that, with the strong commitment of Afghani and international partners alike, the menace of drug cultivation and trafficking, which breeds extremism, could be curtailed.

In conclusion, the future role of the United Nations in Afghanistan is going to be more crucial, especially in the wake of the drawdown and withdrawal of international forces in 2014. The role of UNAMA should evolve on the basis of the situation on the ground, emerging realities and, above all, the aspirations of the people and the Government of Afghanistan. As our officials indicated in their meeting with Mr. Ján Kubiš during his recent visit to Tehran, we support UNAMA activities and wish Mr. Kubiš the greatest of success in fulfilling his mission.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Arias (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): This summer will herald a decisive moment for the international community's commitment in Afghanistan. Spain has been part of that commitment from the outset and has

devoted significant military and civilian efforts, with the clear aim of contributing to the stabilization and reconstruction of the country.

I join previous speakers in thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/350) and Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing. I also acknowledge the important work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I note in particular the work carried out by my colleague and friend Ambassador Tanin.

Throughout the past 12 years, Spain has continuously been one of the main contributors to the Security Council-mandated NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF). Like our partners in ISAF, we have now begun withdrawal. At the present time, there are some 900 Spanish soldiers deployed in the provinces of Herat, where the airport is operated by Spain, Badghis, where the Spanish provincial reconstruction team is based, Qala-i-Naw and Kabul.

Spain resolutely supports the efforts of the Afghan Government in the ongoing and complex transition process, in both the security and civilian perspectives. We welcome this week's announcement of the achievement of milestone 2013, whereby Afghan forces will take the lead in security operations and of the start of the fifth and final phase of the transition process. Last December, Murghab district was included in tranche 4, bringing the entirety of the Badghis province into the transition process. We are satisfied at the way in which the transition is progressing. Spain will remain fully engaged by providing advice, capacity-building and support to the Afghan security forces until the conclusion of the process.

With regard to the civilian aspect of transition, the vast majority of the cooperation projects Spain is carrying out in its area of responsibility is already being managed by Afghan personnel. The transfer has been formalized through the signing of appropriate agreements with the competent Afghan ministries. In July, seven years of successful presence of direct Spanish Cooperation in Afghanistan will come to an end. The participation of the Spanish Cooperation will continue in the years to come under the form of multilateral projects through our contributions to international organizations.

The year 2012 was one of major international events related to Afghanistan; 2013 is the time to build upon their numerous accomplishments. For example, the bases are currently being laid for the new allied mission that will operate after 2014, which will focus exclusively on training, assistance and support for the further strengthening of the Afghan National Security Forces after 2015.

At the regional level, we are pleased to note that the Istanbul Process, whose main objective is to promote cooperation and regional security to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan, is making decisive progress. Furthermore, the Mutual Accountability Framework, agreed last year in Tokyo, continues to lay the groundwork for the political and financial sustainability needed to uphold the current Afghan regime. The Afghan Government must, in that context, continue and strengthen its fulfillment of its fundamental commitments in the areas of governance, development, the rule of law, human rights and the fight against corruption. In that regard, the presidential election announced for 5 April 2014 will be a significant logistical test, to meet which the international community will provide support to Afghanistan. The Afghan authorities will be responsible for ensuring an inclusive, transparent and democratic election that produces results that are fully acceptable to the Afghan people. The work and support of the United Nations will be of the utmost importance in that election. Spain underscores the central and impartial role that the United Nations plays in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The Afghan election is also closely linked to the process of reconciliation and reintegration of Taliban elements willing to participate in the democratic system. We support all efforts aimed at making such reconciliation a reality, despite the enormous resistance that the process faces both inside Afghanistan and in the complex regional environment. We must strongly support dialogue that leads to a sustainable and inclusive reconciliation process that involves armed groups and all sectors of Afghan society.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Latvia.

Ms. Freimane-Deksne (Latvia): Latvia aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and would like to make a few remarks in its national capacity.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report and Special Representative Ján Kubiš and

the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) team for their dedicated work in carrying out the tasks of the Mission. Although the concrete modalities for post-2014 cooperation between Afghanistan and international community are yet to be defined, the United Nations will continue to play an important role throughout the transition and during the transformation decade.

I would like to focus Latvia's comments today on two key areas, namely, regional cooperation and the international community's long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

Turning first to regional cooperation, we believe that this is critical for achieving long-term stability and economic development in Afghanistan. We welcome in particular regional initiatives such as the Heart of Asia process, including the outcome of its third Ministerial Conference, held in Almaty in April. The adoption of implementation plans on confidence-building measures (CBMs) between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries is a strong foundation for further cooperation at the regional level. Latvia has also become an active participant in the Heart of Asia process and is currently exploring possibilities for supporting the implementation of CBMs for regional infrastructure, led by Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

Afghanistan and Central Asia are situated on ancient trade routes. Their involvement in international economic and trade processes is essential for the security, stability and development of Afghanistan and the whole region. In the light of that, on 11 and 12 June, Latvia hosted an annual high-level workshop on the theme "Arteries connecting the Heart of Asia to the global world", which brought together more than 220 Government officials, foreign policy experts and representatives of transport and logistics companies from countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, Afghanistan, the United States, the Russian Federation, India, Pakistan, Qatar and others, as well as representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Participants concluded that regional stability and improved trade relations were mutually interconnected factors. Mutual economic ties should be developed both within the region and with global markets. Developing commercial transit routes, for example, on the basis of experience acquired within the Northern Distribution Network, as well as the plans of some Central Asian States and Afghanistan to seek membership in the World Trade Organization, could be steps in the right direction. On behalf of my Government, I would like to thank all the participants for their contributions. We are ready to share the conclusions of the workshop with all interested parties.

With 2014 approaching, the international community must remain committed to Afghanistan's long-term stability. We look forward to reviewing the progress of mutual commitments undertaken at the Tokyo Conference by the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. The principles of good governance, the rule of law and human rights, in particular the rights of women, are the basis for sustained economic growth and development.

With the gradual downsizing of International Security Assisantance Force troops in Afghanistan and with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) assuming lead responsibility for security across the country, building public confidence in their capacity to protect the population is critical. While security challenges remain considerable in the country, international support to build up the capacities of the ANSF after 2014 and beyond is essential. Latvia has already committed to providing financial support to the ANSF starting from 2015.

The support to Afghanistan in security sector should be accompanied by support in areas that will facilitate Afghanistan's integration into regional and global processes. In order to achieve a sustainable solution in Afghanistan and in the region, the role of Central Asian countries should be recognized. High-level dialogue and cooperation with Central Asian countries should be developed at different international forums, and Latvia will contribute in that regard, including during its presidency in the European Union Council in 2015. Regional cooperation is also crucial in tackling such global threats as terrorism and drug trafficking. The NATO-Russia Council Project on Counter-Narcotics Training, implemented in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, shows where common interests and common efforts pay off. Latvia has provided a continuous financial contribution to the project and is currently considering the possibilities for technical assistance in Central Asian countries.

Integration into regional and global economic processes will require specialists and experts. The Latvian Government is currently looking for new ways to step up development assistance. Latvia is already contributing to the capacity-building of Afghan

aviation and railroad experts and is considering new fields of cooperation where Latvia's specific advantage stands out, such as customs, border guard and training medical specialists.

With many challenges and opportunities ahead during the transition and beyond, only our common commitment, efforts and constructive engagement can ensure the security, stability and sustained economic development of Afghanistan and the wider region. Let me reassure the Council of Latvia's continuous involvement in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Husain (Canada): I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to address the Council. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/350), and I commend the work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is doing in an increasingly hostile environment.

A copy of Canada's full statement has been circulated among the members of the Security Council and is available on our website. Given the time constraints, I shall touch on only a few key points.

We are at a crossroads. Down one path a nation emerges from generations of war and bloodshed and steps forward into a future of freedom and prosperity. Down the other, lie the games of the past, of regional interests allied with the false promises of terrorists and their tyranny, of a people suffocated by brutal warlords and unscrupulous gangsters, of the tragic story of lost generations. Corrosive actors are the culprits of fragility, just as nation-builders are the pioneers for prosperous societies.

Next month marks the one-year anniversary of the Tokyo Conference, which saw a renewed commitment by the international community, including Canada, to Afghanistan's future. On 3 July, senior officials will gather in Kabul to take stock of the progress that has been made over the past year on those commitments. Three are among the most essential.

First, the Government of Afghanistan must focus on the full implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women in its current form. Afghan women and girls need and deserve the protecion that the law is meant to provide. However, they will get that only if the law is fully implemented by a willing and capable justice sector, including police, prosecutors and judges. Tracking the law's implementation was a key commitment made by the Government of Afghanistan, which will be measured on its fulfilment of that commitment.

Secondly, it is essential that the Government of Afghanistan demonstrate earnest commitment to a robust electoral process. That includes progress in meeting key deliverables, including the establishment of a credible electoral dispute resolution mechanism and legislation that allows for the appointment of qualified individuals to that body and to the Independent Election Commission. Candidate vetting, the preservation of free and independent media and the participation of civil society must be permitted to feature prominently throughout the process.

Thirdly, Canada will be resolutely focused on efforts made to improve financial accountability and combat corruption.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada remains determined to support Afghanistan throughout the transition period. However, we have stated clearly that we must continue to see progress towards greater transparency, accountability, good governance and respect for human rights, especially the rights of girls and women, freedom of religion and conscience and freedom of experience.

We have also been equally clear that terrorism networks from neighbouring States must be held accountable, including thsoe who support them.

Reconciliation that fails to enshrine the indispensable rights of women, advance constitutional democracy and confront endemic corruption will not be viewed as genuine reconciliation.

In the face of such adversity, national organizations of young members of civil society are emerging and growing more confident in their capacities. They are helping to build the institutiuons that will guaranteed Afghanistan's future. We must commit ourselves more resolutely to supporting those institutions and their ideals, rather than those who walk in their halls and seek to subvert them for personal gain.

Along that path towards freedom and prosperity in Afghanistan, Canada stands with those who seek to build a better future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Berger (Germany): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report. I would also like to welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ján Kubiš, and extend my thanks to him for his briefing and his and his team's dedicated work in support of the Afghan people.

My Government aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier in this debate by the observer of the European Union.

Afghanistan has come a long way in its security, political and economic transitions, and progress has been achieved in many respects.

In 2011 and 2012, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community set the framework for continued close cooperation throughout the Transformation Decade at conferences held in Istanbul, Bonn, Kabul and Tokyo as well as at the Chicago summit.

Those conferences sent a clear message of the continued support of the international community to Afghanistan and its people.

This year is set to provide important steps by Afghanistan in implementing the decisions taken at these conferences. Germany will continue to support Afghanistan in its efforts to do so.

My Government welcomes the progress made in the transition of security responsibility. President Karzai announced the fifth and final tranche of security transition earlier this week. With that milestone event, the Afghan National Security Forces have resumed lead security responsibility throughout the country. The security forces continue to face serious challenges, as the latest series of attacks on Afghan and international institutions demonstrates. However, Germany is confident that, with evolving but persistent international support, the Afghan security forces will continue to prove capable of responding to those challenges.

At the Bonn and Tokyo Conferences, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community reaffirmed their partnership and agreed on mutual commitments constituting the foundation on which their long-term partnership rests. My Government is convinced that the comprehensive and timely implementation of the commitments contained in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework is of paramount importance in achieving Afghanistan's goal of developing into a democratic and economically thriving country.

In that regard, we acknowledge the progress made by the Government of Afghanistan in preparing for the presidential and provincial council elections to be held on 5 April 2014, but further progress is a pressing requirement. Germany is particularly concerned with regard to the pending decisions on the legal framework for the elections, including the establishment of a credible electoral complaints mechanism as well as the pending appointment of a new chairman to the Independent Election Commission. Furthermore, effective measures need to be put in place to prevent widespread electoral fraud. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan can further increase its beneficial role in supporting that Afghan-led and -owned process. Our shared objective is to hold inclusive, transparent and credible elections in Afghanistan.

Preserving and consolidating gains in the protection and promotion of human rights in Afghanistan is of the utmost importance. We are confident that the Government of Afghanistan will continue to ensure the independence of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission according to Afghan law and the Paris Principles.

Germany looks forward to the senior officials meeting to be held in Kabul on 3 July with the aim of reviewing the progress made so far in implementing the mutual commitments of the Accountability Framework. Progress on those issues ahead of the meeting is strongly encouraged.

We welcome the opening of the Taliban office in Doha. That could well be a new beginning, one that will take years to unfold and will no doubt experience many setbacks. Yet, we believe that there is no alternative to that path. All now depends upon the willingness of all the Afghan interlocutors to engage in substantive negotiations. As in the past, Germany remains willing to lend its good offices, if and when needed.

I would like to conclude by underlining that Germany will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan through transition and beyond.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.